

Claims

What is claimed is:

1 1. A computer-implemented method for managing access to a resource,
2 comprising:
3 receiving, from a first user having an authentication credential with re-
4 spect to the resource, a message that a second user be granted
5 access to the resource;
6 receiving, from the second user, a request to access the resource; and
7 responsive to the request from the second user, obtaining the first user's
8 authentication credential and granting the second user access to
9 the resource by providing the first user's authentication creden-
10 tial to the resource.

1 2. The method of claim 1, wherein granting the second user access com-
2 prises activating a temporary access credential for the second user.

1 3. The method of claim 1, wherein granting the second user access com-
2 prises creating an entity relationship between an account associated with the
3 second user and an account associated with the first user.

1 4. The method of claim 3, wherein the account associated with the second
2 user comprises a support representative account.

1 5. The method of claim 1, wherein the message identifies the second user
2 and specifies a level of access for the second user, and wherein granting the sec-
3 ond user access comprises granting the specified level of access.

1 6. The method of claim 1, wherein the second user belongs to a group of
2 users, and the message identifies the group of users to which the second user be-
3 longs.

1 7. The method of claim 6, further comprising:
2 receiving an identifier from the second user, identifying the second user as
3 belonging to the group of users.

1 8. The method of claim 6, further comprising:
2 authenticating the second user as belonging to the group of users.

1 9. The method of claim 6, wherein the group comprises support represen-
2 tatives.

1 10. The method of claim 1, further comprising:
2 authenticating the second user;
3 and wherein granting the second user access to the resource comprises:
4 responsive to the request from the second user and responsive to the au-
5 thentication of the second user being successful, granting the

second user access to the resource by providing the first user's authentication credential to the resource.

11. The method of claim 1, wherein granting the second user access to the resource comprises granting the second user a level of access different from the level of access available to the first user.

12. The method of claim 1, wherein receiving the message comprises receiving the message via a network.

13. The method of claim 12, wherein receiving the request comprises receiving the request via the network.

14. The method of claim 12, wherein receiving the request comprises receiving the request via a second network.

15. The method of claim 1, further comprising storing in an audit log information describing the second user's access to the resource and identifying the second user in connection with the access.

16. A computer-implemented method for managing levels of access to a resource for at least two users, comprising:

establishing a control relationship between a first user's authentication credential and a second user's authentication credential, the

control relationship allowing the first user to specify at least one
parameter of the second user's level of access to a resource;
receiving, from the second user, a request to access the resource; and
responsive to the request from the second user, granting the second user
access to the resource according to the second user's level of access
as specified by the first user.

17. The method of claim 16, wherein the second user is a support representative.

18. The method of claim 16, further comprising:
terminating the second user's access to the resource.

19. The method of claim 1 or 16, further comprising:
terminating the second user's access to the resource after a predetermined
time period.

20. The method of claim 19, wherein the predetermined time period is selectable by the first user.

21. The method of claim 1 or 16, further comprising:
terminating the second user's access to the resource after the second user
has accessed the resource a predetermined number of times.

1 22. The method of claim 21, wherein the predetermined number of times
2 is selectable by the first user.

1 23. The method of claim 1 or 16, further comprising:
2 terminating the second user's access to the resource in response to a com-
3 mand received from the first user.

1 24. The method of claim 1 or 16, further comprising:
2 terminating the second user's access to the resource in response to a pre-
3 determined event.

1 25. The method of claim 1 or 16, further comprising:
2 responsive to granting the second user access, outputting, to the first user,
3 notification of the second user's access to the resource.

1 26. The method of claim 1 or 16, further comprising:
2 responsive to granting the second user access, storing information describ-
3 ing the second user's access to the resource.

1 27. The method of claim 26, wherein storing information comprises stor-
2 ing the information in an audit log.

1 28. The method of claim 1 or 16, further comprising:

2 storing information describing at least one subsequent interaction with the
3 resource.

1 29. The method of claim 28, wherein storing information comprises, for
2 each interaction, storing information identifying which user accesses the re-
3 source.

1 30. The method of claim 1 or 16, wherein the access to the resource by the
2 second user is masked so that the resource is unable to distinguish it from access
3 by the first user.

1 31. The method of claim 16, wherein the first user's level of access is dif-
2 ferent from the second user's level of access.

1 32. The method of claim 1 or 16, wherein the resource comprises at least
2 one selected from the group consisting of:

3 a data file;

4 a data file stored at a server;

5 an application; and

6 data associated with the first user.

1 33. The method of claim 1 or 16, wherein the steps of the method are per-
2 formed by a web-based application.

34. A system for granting resource access to a second user in response to a message from a first user, comprising:

an authenticator communicatively adapted to receive over a network connection authentication credentials of the first and second users and adapted to authenticate each user from the authentication credentials;

an access level control module, communicatively coupled to the authenticator, for defining for each user a level of access to a resource for the user; and

a resource interface, communicatively coupled to the access level control module, for granting the second user access to the resource by providing the first user's authentication credential to the authenticator for authentication.

35. The system of claim 34, wherein the access level control module activates a temporary access credential for the second user.

36. The system of claim 34, wherein the access level control module creates an entity relationship between an account associated with the second user and an account associated with the first user.

1 37. A system for granting resource access to a second user in response to a
2 message from a first user, comprising:

3 an access level control module, for establishing a control relationship be-
4 tween the first user's authentication credential and the second
5 user's authentication credential, the control relationship allow-
6 ing the first user to control at least one parameter of the second
7 user's level of access; and

8 a resource interface, coupled to the access level control module, for grant-
9 ing the second user access to the resource according to the sec-
10 ond user's level of access, by providing the first user's authenti-
11 cation credential to the resource.

1 38. The system of claim 34 or 37, wherein the resource interface further
2 terminates the second user's access to the resource.

1 39. The system of claim 34 or 37, wherein the resource interface further
2 terminates the second user's access to the resource after a predetermined time
3 period.

1 40. The system of claim 39, wherein the predetermined time period is se-
2 lectable by the first user.

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1 41. The system of claim 34 or 37, wherein the resource interface further
2 terminates the second user's access to the resource after the second user has ac-
3 cessed the resource a predetermined number of times.

1 42. The system of claim 41, wherein the predetermined number of times is
2 selectable by the first user.

1 43. The system of claim 34 or 37, wherein the resource interface further
2 terminates the second user's access to the resource in response to a command re-
3 ceived from the first user.

1 44. The system of claim 34 or 37, wherein the resource interface further
2 terminates the second user's access to the resource in response to a predeter-
3 mined event.

1 45. The system of claim 34 or 37, further comprising:
2 an output device, coupled to the resource interface, for outputting, to the
3 first user, notification of the second user's access to the resource.

1 46. The system of claim 34 or 37, further comprising:
2 a storage device, coupled to the resource interface, for storing information
3 describing the second user's access to the resource.

1 47. The system of claim 46, wherein the storage device stores information
2 identifying which user accesses the resource.

1 48. The system of claim 34 or 37, wherein the access to the resource by the
2 second user is masked so that the resource is unable to distinguish it from access
3 by the first user.

1 49. The system of claim 34 or 37, wherein the resource comprises at least
2 one selected from the group consisting of:

3 a data file;

4 a data file stored at a server;

5 an application; and

6 data associated with the first user.

1 50. In a client/server system for granting resource access to a second user
2 in response to a message from a first user specifying that the second user be
3 granted access to the resource, a server comprising:

4 an authenticator, for authenticating each user according to authentication
5 credentials;

6 an access level control module, coupled to the authenticator, for defining a
7 level of access to the resource for each user; and

a resource interface, coupled to the access level control module, for granting to a client operated by the second user access to the resource by providing the first user's authentication credential to the resource.

51. In a client/server system for granting resource access to a second user in response to a message from a first user specifying that the second user be granted access to the resource, a server comprising:

an access level control module, for establishing a control relationship between the first user's authentication credential and the second user's authentication credential, the control relationship allowing the first user to control at least one parameter of the second user's level of access; and

a resource interface, coupled to the access level control module, for granting to the client operated by the second user access to the resource according to the second user's level of access, by providing the first user's authentication credential to the resource.

52. In a client/server system for managing user access to a resource, including a server having an authenticator for authenticating at least two users according to authentication credentials, an access level control module for defining a level of access to the resource for each of at least a first user and a second user, and a resource interface for granting to the second user access to the resource by

6 providing the first user's authentication credential to the resource, a client com-
7 prising:

8 an input device, for receiving input from a first user specifying that a sec-
9 ond user be granted access to the resource; and

10 an output device, for transmitting the received input to the access level
11 control module to grant to the second user the access to the re-
12 source.

1 53. In a client/server system for managing user access to a resource in-
2 cluding a server having an access level control module for establishing a control
3 relationship between a first user's authentication credential and a second user's
4 authentication credential, the control relationship allowing the first user to con-
5 trol at least one parameter of the second user's level of access, and a resource in-
6 terface for granting to the client operated by the second user access to the re-
7 source according to the second user's level of access, by providing the first user's
8 authentication credential to the resource, a client comprising:

9 an input device, for receiving input from a first user specifying that a sec-
10 ond user be granted access to the resource and for receiving in-
11 put from the first user specifying at least one parameter of the
12 second user's level of access; and

an output device, for transmitting the received input to the access level control module to grant to the second user the access to the resource.

54. A computer program product comprising a computer-usable medium having computer-readable code embodied therein for managing access to a resource, comprising:

computer-readable program code configured to cause a computer to receive, from a first user having an authentication credential with respect to the resource, a message that a second user be granted access to the resource;

computer-readable program code configured to cause a computer to receive, from the second user, a request to access the resource; and

computer-readable program code configured to cause a computer to, responsive to the request from the second user, obtain the first user's authentication credential and grant the second user access to the resource by providing the first user's authentication credential to the resource.

55. The computer program product of claim 54, wherein the computer-readable program code configured to cause a computer to grant the second user access comprises computer-readable program code configured to cause a computer to activate a temporary access credential for the second user.

5 tion credential and a second user's authentication credential, the
6 control relationship allowing the first user to specify at least one
7 parameter of the second user's level of access to a resource;
8 computer-readable program code configured to cause a computer to re-
9 ceive, from the second user, a request to access the resource; and
10 computer-readable program code configured to cause a computer to, re-
11 sponsive to the request from the second user, grant the second
12 user access to the resource according to the second user's level
13 of access as specified by the first user.

1 59. The computer program product of claim 54 or 58, further comprising:
2 computer-readable program code configured to cause a computer to, re-
3 sponsive to granting the second user access, store information
4 describing the second user's access to the resource.

1 60. The computer program product of claim 54 or 58, further comprising:
2 computer-readable program code configured to cause a computer to store
3 information describing at least one subsequent interaction with
4 the resource.

1 61. The computer program product of claim 60, wherein the computer-
2 readable program code configured to cause a computer to store information
3 comprises, computer-readable program code configured to cause a computer to,

4 for each interaction, store information identifying which user accesses the re-
5 source.

1 62. The computer program product of claim 54 or 58, wherein the access
2 to the resource by the second user is masked so that the resource is unable to dis-
3 tinguish it from access by the first user.

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